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ABSTRACT

A delineated philosophy, a written curriculum that reflects that philosophy, and a practiced program that reflects sex equality in its design as well as in its teacher attitudes and behaviors are all crucial ingredients for the development of a nonsexist physical education program. This paper provides concrete suggestions for the most direct methods of facilitating a nondiscriminatory program. (Author/LH)

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DEVELOPING A K-12 NON-SEXIST PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Developing A K-12 Non-Sexist Physical Education Curriculum

A non-sexist curriculum is one which is designed without assumptions based on sex, without generalizations made on the basis of sex, and without grouping or distinguishing on the basis of sex. It does not treat students as a class based on their gender, but rather treats students as individuals with varying abilities.

It is very important to realize that the curriculum at one level is impacted by that which precedes it and will impact that which follows it. It is therefore necessary to look at the curriculum as a whole if we really wish to make it non-sexist. This means also that pre-school experiences will have already made their mark, and that we must recognize that we may be playing "catch-up" from the very beginning. Studies document well the sex role stereotyping that exists in the attitudes of young children and in the rearing practices of parents. Such stereotyping is evidenced in toy selection, in experiences accorded boys and girls, in behavior expectations, and in parental treatment.

Where such stereotyping and sexism are evidenced in children in class, physical educators need to be prepared to respond to the child and to the classmates in such a way that the thinking patterns of all are enlarged and that the stereotype is reduced. Physical educators need to be alert to sexist practices and attitudes, and then make an attempt to trace their source. Sharing time during departmental meetings that involves K-12 physical educators can be used to heighten the awareness of all teachers and to devise some change strategies to deal with

the identified problems. To develop a non-sexist curriculum, the physical education program must be re-evaluated from three vantage points: (1) Philosophy, (2) Printed Program, and (3) Practiced Program.

(1) Philosophy

The central question is, what do we believe to be the vital goals/objectives, activities/experiences for students in physical education? Not for boys, not for girls, but for students. We must look at students needs from an ideal vantage point, and not let ourselves be restricted or limited by the traditional pursuits and interests of each sex.

Activity selection will need to be reassessed in relation to these overall objectives, and the curricular components will likewise have to be reassessed in terms of the percentage of time to be devoted to team sports, individual and dual sports, rhythms, aquatics, outdoor recreation, etc. The traditional sex-typed activities will require special examination as their contributions to the objectives for all students are analyzed. In particular, football, some gymnastics events, synchronized swimming, slimnastics, wrestling, and modern dance will require careful evaluations as to legitimate and valuable activities for all students.

Philosophy must be the guiding factor in activity selection. Social values vs. recreational skills vs. specific sports skills development are all tracts with varying implications. The role of physical fitness in the program will also have a bearing on activity selection. Contact sports may be the most controversial in the decision-making process, but care must be taken to give full

review to the values involved with an open mind. An article by Boslooper (1976) in the Journal of Physical Education and Recreation makes an excellent case for the importance of physical contact experiences for women and in particular in coeducational situations. The American Medical Association has also encouraged participation by girls and women in contact sports, although not on a contact basis.

It cannot be stressed enough that the overriding factor must be the value of the activity in and of itself. Of what value is wrestling as an activity? Not as something that one sex may have traditionally done more or less of in the past, or that one sex may presently compete in now or not, or that one sex may appear to be more interested in than the other at present.

In implementing this non-sexist philosophy, consideration may need to be given to affirmative or remedial action. Some measures may be necessary to compensate for the lack of background or experience that one sex may have in some areas. This may also necessitate some flexibility in grouping and in approaches to students to handle these ability/experience differences. There may further be a necessity for some flexibility in program lay-out, i.e. requiring an activity of all students that might otherwise be offered on an elective basis to ensure that all students have had basic exposure to the activity. Students cannot be expected to make valid decisions about elective activity offerings without a common basic exposure.

All activities in the spectrum deserve equal consideration for inclusion. Activities should not be omitted simply because such action

would offer an "easy remedy" to what might involve a potentially difficult adjustment period. This points again to the importance of establishing the philosophy first. Questions from students, parents, or administrators about activity selection are thus easily answered and decisions clearly defended.

Philosophical decisions will need to be made with regard to the relative importance of various objectives: high level skill in a variety of sports, recreational skills for lifetime participation, competitive skill, responsibility and cooperation skills, positive attitude toward participation, etc. The delineation of these may require extensive dialog and discussion among the staff members to arrive at a concensus.

(2) Printed Program

Once the program philosophy has been established, care must be taken to ensure that the printed curriculum is reflective of and consistent with the philosophy. The written plan must be an accurate representation of the goals and objectives, and an observer ought to be able to make valid distinctions about the philosophy from a review of the activity offerings. An assessment of the percentage breakdown of time devoted to make curricular groupings (i.e. team sports, individual and dual sports, rhythms, aquatics, etc.) provides a basic overview of philosophy. A much more careful analysis of the program offerings is necessary, however, to ensure that there is nothing inherent in the curriculum structure which would perpetuate sexist or stereotypical practices.

Perpetuation of traditional sex role stereotyping can easily occur when students are given choices of activities. Pairings of activities for the choices should be done such that either choice will result in the students' meeting the general objectives established. For example, if the choices available were modern dance and wrestling, students choosing either one would be gaining an entirely different set of benefits than if they had chosen the other. By contrast, if the choices were between modern dance (interpretive), and disco dance or between team handball and field hockey, the students would be exposed to activities with similar values, regardless of the choice. An additional problem inherent in the modern dance/ wrestling choice relates to what was previously discussed above. When the likelihood exists that the students of each sex have widely different

experience levels in the activities, choices will be more apt to reflect the area of their experience. Thus, it may be necessary as noted earlier for special remedial or affirmative efforts to compensate for these differences and to prevent perpetuation of traditional stereotypes.

All courses which have enrollments with significant imbalances by sex should be carefully reviewed to determine reasons for the imbalance. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has indicated that any course which has more than 80 percent of the students of one sex, should be reviewed. Anything related to the curriculum structure or design which contributes to imbalance by sex in activity selection should be changed.

Within the breakdown of skills and activities for each unit, the curriculum guide should be reviewed for sexist language. "Man-to man defense" and "three-man weave" are illustrations of two common uses of sexist language. Studies involving subjects of all age levels have repeatedly shown that a majority interpret language intended to be generic as masculine. The language thus becomes exclusive, rather than inclusive. It is important for physical educators to take special care to use language which is nonsexist. Further examples of sexist lanuage are found in many games played at the elementary school level such as "Old Mother Witch", "Mr. Fox", and "Little Man in a Fix". An area for further precaution is in descriptions of activities. It has been a common practice in the past to find special ways to make rhythms appealing to elementary school boys. One curriculum includes "Pop Goes the Weasel" with the accompanying comment, "This appeals to boys."

Decisions about rules to be used for playing various games need to be made without underlying sexist assumptions. Many schools have modified team sports activities with the stated purpose of improving the safety and participation level for all students. In reality, the action has often been to compensate for what has been perceived as lesser ability by the girls. This only reinforces a sense of physical inferiority among the girls and further perpetuates the old stereotypes. Additionally, such rule changes often "water down" a sport or activity to the point of diminishing the enjoyment level for all involved.

Finally, the printed curriculum must address evaluation procedures in a nonsexist manner. Title IX does allow the use of separate grading scales when the use of a single standard would have an adverse effect on the members of one sex. Great care must be taken, however, that with the use of separate scales, expectations aren't then immediately lowered for the members of one sex. Expectations affect aspirations and performance levels, and if these are lowered, the stereotypes can be further perpetuated. In the coming years, as experiences levels are equalized, one should expect to see less and less necessity for the use of separate standards for evaluation. It would be well for teachers to regularly review the differences in standards, to make adjustments as necessary, and to eliminate them when appropriate.

(3) Practiced Program

A nonsexist philosophy may be clearly delineated and a nonsexist program may reflect that philosophy in the printed guide, but a teacher with nonsexist practices must still implement that program. Nonsexist practices involves the whole area of attitudes and awareness levels.

Within each person attitudes are formed over a long period of socialization; it is a life process. Realizing the changes that have occurred in society in the past ten years, it is not surprising to find a number of practices by teachers which reflect sex role stereotyping. These may be largely unconscious acts, but, nevertheless, they can have damaging effects. Teachers thus need to be keenly aware of sexist attitudes and practices, both within themselves and within others they observe. A study by Geadelmann (1978) revealed that over one half of the students in high school felt that their physical education teachers expected more out of the boys than the girls. Again, expectations affect aspirations, and this is a practice we cannot afford to have if we are truly committed to equalizing opportunities to develop physical skills to the fullest possible measure.

A variety of behaviors can be manifestations of sexist practices and teachers need to be alert for these. Common examples include:

-Placing students in squads by sex

-Disciplining boys strictly and physically, but girls leniently and verbally.

-Encouraging boys to "be gentlemen" in front of the girls.

-Expecting boys to do push-ups from the toes while girls do them from the knees.

-Responding to a good performance by a female with, "She plays well for a girl."

-Having lower expectation levels for the amount of effort exerted by girls in class

-Expecting girls to have little interest or need to develop skills in wrestling and flag football.

-Fearing injury for a girl in class more than for a boy.

-Separating girls out for special practices or drills while boys play the game.

-Accepting lower performance levels by girls as being natural.

Teachers need to be continually alert and sensitive to attitudes and practices which view or treat boys as a group differently from girls as a group. These generalizations need to be carefully analyzed and reviewed. Exceptions [redacted] to every generalization should be recognized, and the result should be, greater attention to individual differences, regardless of gender.

At the same time, it needs to be recognized that there are many operating forces over which the teacher has no control. These forces can be perpetuating stereotypes, quite apart fron physical education class. The home, parents, television, books, and friends will all make their impact --- to say nothing of social tradition itself, however it be perpetuated. Special efforts may be required to overcome these forces. Possibilities include setting up special programs for girls to have additional sports experiences. These might be in the form of clinics conducted by high school varsity athletes (females) or women's intercollegiate athletes. Positive role models need to be available for close interaction. City wide recreation programs and opportunities should be promoted. Parents might be asked to spend time at home with their

daughters practicing specified motor skills, or parents might be asked to spend time assisting in the classroom with the learning/practicing stages. "Being an athlete" must be made appealing and attractive to girls today. Work will also need to be done with student attitudes to foster behavior changes. Students need to be assisted in examining their own attitudes, and examples of sexism in class behavior or conversation should be pointed out and discussed each time they occur.

Additional ideas for promoting positive images of women active in sports activities include bulletin boards, films, books, newspaper clippings, and guest demonstrations.

SUMMARY

The development of a K-12 Nonsexist Physical Education Curriculum is neither a simple nor a short process. Social traditions have left a strong mark on all parties involved, including the teachers assigned to the program. It is to be expected, therefore, that a transition period will be imperative, and that necessarily problems will occur from both the student and the teacher perspective during this adjustment.

The acknowledgement that problems will occur should not be expanded to the thought that blames the program for the problems and concludes that the changes in the program should be eliminated, (i.e. classes returned to sex separate settings). In spite of any problems or adjustments, teachers must have a strong and overriding commitment to the concept of providing fully for equal opportunities for men/women, boys/girls and be willing to explore alternative approaches that will not only

eliminate the problems but provide a better experience for all students in the program.

A delineated philosophy, a written curriculum which reflects that philosophy, and a practiced program which reflects sex equality in its design as well as its teacher attitudes and behaviors are all crucial ingredients for the development of a nonsexist phyisical education currirulum.

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